

May 15, 2008

To: Members of the Legislature
From: Governor Haley Barbour

Yesterday at a meeting of the House Ways and Means Committee several things were brought out about the Mississippi Department of Employment Security that unfortunately didn't make it into the newspapers.

“... among the best in the nation ...”

First, according to Pete Fleming, the U.S. Department of Labor official who oversees states' employment agencies, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security is among the best in the nation at placing job applicants. This is a huge compliment to the leadership and the 715 hard-working employees who do such a great job at this agency on behalf of Mississippians.

“... excellent report ...”

Second, in terms of the operation of its one-stop system, MDES was praised as being among the most efficient and effective in the nation. MDES operates with 100 percent Federal funding, and Federal performance standards are very high. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor's Inspector General recently reviewed MDES' Hurricane Katrina emergency grant operations and issued an excellent report.

“... no time to tamper with success ...”

Third, Mr. Fleming said this is the first time in his 40-plus years of experience working with state employment agencies that the Legislature of any state has failed to re-authorize its employment agency. That fact speaks volumes about how important MDES and its sister agencies across the country are to unemployed workers, under-employed workers, and to the vital causes of job training and development. This is no time to tamper with success.

As I prepare to call you back into a Special Session where re-authorization of MDES will be a primary goal, some in the House of Representatives continue to push an issue which has nothing to do with the highly successful operations of this vital department of state government. If their indefensible lack of action is allowed to stand, unemployed Mississippians can not receive their benefits, businesses will see their unemployment insurance tax rates dramatically multiply, and the State will lose millions of dollars in federal grants.

Moreover, our community colleges will see the loss of workforce investment dollars that are helping train Mississippians for new and higher-paying jobs.

Over the past four years Mississippi's job-creating programs have resulted in a net gain of more than 60,000 new jobs, attributable at least in part to the solid successes at MDES.

I urge you to pass a clean, unadulterated re-authorization of the Mississippi Department of Employment Security so the vital work of this essential agency can continue.

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